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DR. IRA B. CURTIS.

CONTRIBUTED BY WM. E. NELSON.

Doctor Ira B. Curtis, the subject of this brief sketch, was a man endowed by nature with no ordinary mind, of sterling integrity and indomitable energy, as was illustrated by his whole life.

His ancestry emigrated from the old world and settled in the state of Connecticut prior to the Revolutionary war. His father, Carlos Curtis, was born in that state, and removed from there to the state of Ohio, where he resided for a time, and then in 1835 removed with his family to the State of Illinois. He located upon this move at Round Prairie near Springfield, Illinois. In 1836 he entered land in Coles county, Illinois, south of the village of Oakland, in the last named county, and died there upon his farm in 1844, aged 58 years.

Doctor Curtis, the subject of this memoir, was born on the 18th day of October in the year 1823 and was twelve years old when he came with his father to Illinois.

The Doctor's early education was received in the imperfect county schools, first in Ohio and later in the counties of Sangamon and Coles in this State.

At the age of seventeen years, with his father's consent, he left home to carry out for himself his own destiny among his fellow men.

With twenty-five cents in pocket he came to Decatur, Illinois and made his home with his sister, the wife of Kirby Benedict, a prominent lawyer of that city, at that time.

The winter of his arrival in Decatur he attended school in a frame building that stood on East William street, in that city. Ex-Governor R. J. Oglesby, Henry Elliott and "Dock" Martin were classmates of his at that school.

In the spring of 1842 he returned to Coles county to study Latin, under a teacher near his father's home.

His teacher was called away by illness in his family and Doctor Curtis had advanced so rapidly in his studies, that the teacher left the boy in charge of the school and he taught to the end of the term of nine months.

In 1843 he returned to Decatur and began the study of medicine under the instruction of Doctor Joseph King. He made such rapid progress in his studies that after one and one-half years Doctor King started him out to treat cases of malarial fever, which were quite common at that time, and his practice was quite successful.

In 1846 he entered the University of Missouri at St. Louis and graduated therefrom in 1849. In that year he severed his partnership with Doctor King and located in Taylorville, Illinois. On the 10th of June, 1849, he married Jane Butler, daughter of Mr. William Butler of Decatur, Illinois.

Mrs. Curtis proved to be a most estimable wife and mother and was devoted to the comfort and well-being of her husband and children.

In April, 1856, after seven years of successful practice of his profession in Taylorville, he returned to Decatur and entered into partnership with Doctor Wm. J. Chenoweth, a leading doctor of Decatur, and was engaged in a lucrative practice until the breaking out of the war of the Rebellion.

In February 1862 at the request of Governor Yates, Doctor Curtis went to the front to assist in caring for soldiers who had been wounded at the storming of Fort Donelson. He rendered like service at Cairo, again after the battle at Shiloh in 1862 he was stationed at Mound City, where for a time he was in charge of the hospital. Here assistance in the hospital was insufficient and great labor devolved upon the doctor, and he was seized by an attack of paralysis paraplegia.

This attack rendered it impossible for the doctor further to pursue his labors in the hospital and he returned to his home in Decatur, wholly deprived of the use of his lower limbs and so a cripple for the balance of his days. Here he came near losing his life by the mistake of a druggist in filling a prescription. The doctor recovered from the effects of this mistake after a time but never from the paralysis of his lower limbs.

For twenty-nine years he never left his chair without assistance. In the fall of 1863 Doctor Curtis became the Republican candidate for treasurer of Macon county. At that time county treasurers in Illinois were permitted to succeed themselves and Doctor Curtis was re-elected time after time, and performed the duties of that office for six years. He then made a special study of the diseases of the eye and ear and for some time successfully practiced in that branch of his profession.

From 1877 to his death on the 16th day of December 1891, Doctor Curtis was time after time elected a justice of the peace, in Decatur and filled that office during that period with credit to himself and to the entire satisfaction of his constituency, until his death.

There were born to Doctor Curtis five children, Lamar, Otto E., Ida, Willie and Frank. Lamar and Otto attained manhood but are both dead now. They were both active business men. Ida and Willie died in infancy. Frank Curtis is the only surviving child. He lives in Decatur, Illinois, and is president of one of the largest jewelry stores in Central Illinois, an incorporated institution known as Frank Curtis & Co. To him the writer is indebted for the dates and details of this article.

Doctor Curtis knew more men and was known by more people perhaps than any man of his time in Macon county, and was deservedly one of the most popular men of the county.

To perpetuate the memory of such a man is a grateful task.

The pages of the publications of the Illinois State Historical Society are a fitting place for that purpose. His habits of industry and economy secured to him more than a mere subsistence and he left to his widow an ample living.